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# ART AND PROGRESS

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## A GREETING

I wish to send, through my friend Miss Seaton-Schmidt, greetings to all my friends in America, and to express my profound gratitude for their sympathetic appreciation of my art; it has been a great encouragement to me.

I sincerely admire your young country, which possesses a veritable thirst for the beautiful, and which will in time grasp and comprehend all that is greatest in art.

*De grand cœur,*

AUGUSTE RODIN.

## TO THE VENUS DE MILO

BY AUGUSTE RODIN

Translated by Anna Seaton-Schmidt, and published herewith through the kind permission of M. Rodin and the editor of *L'Art et les Artistes*, in which this essay originally appeared.

MODELED by the sea, reservoir of all power, thou reignest over us by that perfect grace, that tranquillity which strength alone possesses. Thy noble serenity communicates itself to us, sinking into our hearts like the charm of some grave, quiet music. What triumphant proportions! What strong, vigorous shadows! From the confines of the earth men come to contemplate thee, oh venerated marble; and the faint light of day in the gallery wherein thou art seems to withdraw itself that thou alone may shine forth; while the silent hours pass, weighted down with admiration.

After having bestowed the gift of thy loveliness upon thy contemporaries, thou givest it now to us, to the universe! O Venus immortal, thou canst still hear and understand our praise! It seems as though the twenty-five centuries of thy life had but confirmed thy invincible youth.

Generation after generation, those waves of the ocean of life, irresistibly attracted, return again and again to worship thee, O conqueror of time!

In the midst of our tumultuous modern life thou canst still offer long moments of quiet contemplation to the poets,



VENUS DE MILO

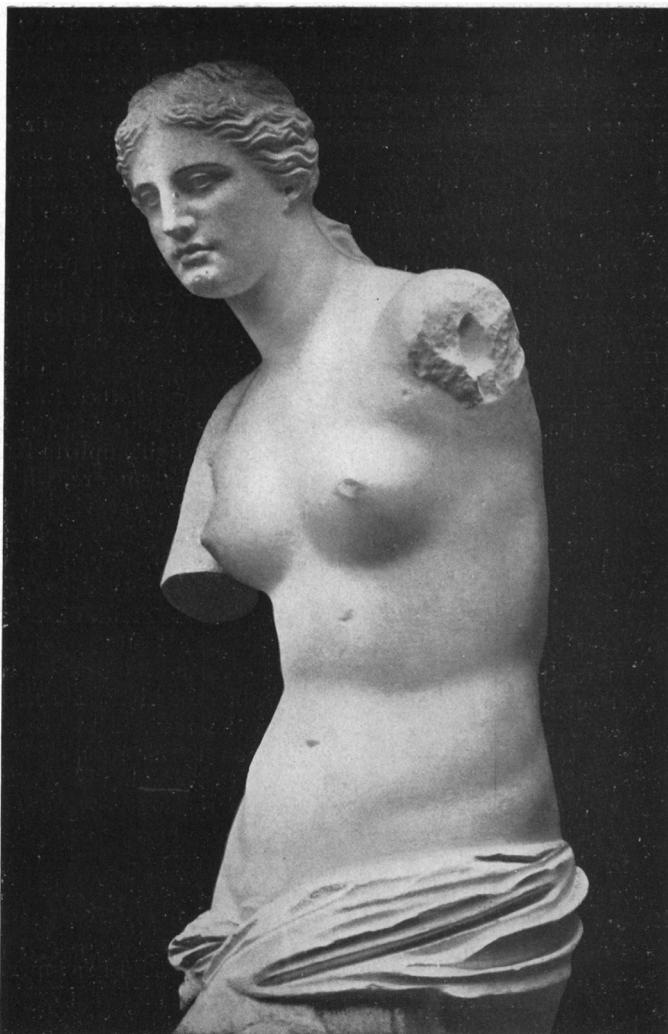
MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

the seekers after truth, the modest artists. Though mutilated, to them thou art ever perfect. Those traces upon thee of the outrages of time but prove the futility of his impious efforts.

Thou art no dumb, unproductive statue, image of some unreal goddess, thou art alive, thou art Woman—therein lies all thy glory. That which is divine in thee is the infinite love of thy creator for nature. More ardent, above all more patient than other men to her, he has succeeded in lifting one corner of her

veil, too heavy for indolent hands to raise.

Nor art thou a mosaic of admirably adjusted pieces; such beauty as thine does not exist in independent parts, but only in that perfect unity of atoms which are reciprocally created one by the other, in accordance with nature's harmonious laws. Through this indivisible ensemble passes the current of life, that current from which thou hast emerged, whole and perfected. Fragments, no matter how lovely, could never have attained this abso-



VENUS DE MILO

MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

lute oneness. A single detail which failed to harmonize, the slightest discord between the different parts, and the masterpiece would be destroyed, would become inconsistent, a thing abhorred by nature. Such must be the fate of any assemblage of parts, however perfect, chosen, however skilfully, from different models.

But thou, thou art alive, and thy thoughts are the thoughts of a woman, not of some strange, superior being, artificial and imaginary. Thou art made of truth alone, outside of which there is

neither strength nor beauty. It is thy sincerity to nature which makes thee all powerful, because nature appeals to all men. Thou art the familiar companion, the woman that each believes he knows, but that no man has ever understood, the wisest not more than the simple. Who understands the trees? Who can comprehend the light?

However, we should devote ourselves to a constant, scrupulous, more and more profound study of nature; such study is never wasted.

There are men who call the Venus "Ideal." If this word has any meaning, it signifies only their stupidity. The Ideal! The Dream! But the realities of life surpass our loftiest dreams. Our minds are but an infinitesimal atom of the Infinite of nature; the part can never embrace, never dominate the whole. Man is incapable of creating, of originating. He can only follow nature, docilely, lovingly, otherwise she will never reveal herself to him. She will permit him to see only as much as his patient study has enabled him to comprehend. But even so little is a great gain. He who understood the secrets of nature sufficiently to wrest from them the life that we adore in the Venus de Milo, was the equal of Prometheus. Nothing can ever take the place of this persevering study, to it alone will the mystery of life be revealed. To devote yourself patiently, passionately to this research, and at last to comprehend! What victory! Thereafter you shall belong to that inner circle whose joy is Eternal.

To understand, to see, truly to see! Who would hesitate to undertake the indispensable apprenticeship, no matter how long and laborious it might prove, could he conceive of the bliss which such knowledge would bestow. To understand! This is never to know death!

For myself, the ancient masterpieces blend themselves in my memory with all the joys of my early manhood; or rather, the antique is my youth itself, which surges still in my heart and hides from me the fact that I have grown old.

As in early times saints revealed to the young monk in his cell all those things useful for a youth to know, so in the Louvre these Olympian gods whispered them to me; later they protected and inspired me. After an absence of twenty years I came back to them with a joy indescribable, I understood them.

These divine fragments, these old marbles which have existed more than two thousand years, speak to me more clearly, move me more profoundly than living persons.

If, in their turn, the younger generation would but meditate upon these mar-

velous works, would strive, through intelligence and love, to elevate themselves to their height, they would find in them their deepest joy.

The great artists worked as nature composed, and not as the anatomist decreed. They did not carve a muscle, a nerve, a bone, for itself, but for its relation to the ensemble, which alone they saw and strove to express. It is always in large masses that their works vibrate in the light or fall into shadow. Thus, as we look at the Venus, three-fourths of one side is glowing with light, the opposite side being bathed in shadow. Stand a little further off and the head, outlined by the dim light, uplifts itself and dominates the whole figure, whilst the lines in repose, the long curving lines of the back and hips, melt into each other in melodious harmony. \* \* \* The face has the freedom and variety of a flower, and the artist who studies it attentively comes away with a feeling of religious awe—he has heard the voice of Venus.

Walk around the statue and there observe the face, there are shadows about the mouth where but now all was light. To the drawing has been added the modeling and the hesitating lines have become firm.

\* \* \*

The very soul of form breathes in the profound life of this palpitating body. I behold her magnificent substructure of bones as I behold her inner thoughts. All her grace, hidden and expressed, is based on its strength. Beneath her lovely exterior, where the eye encounters only softest modulations, one distinctly feels the resistance of a firm, powerful framework. Sustained by this basic strength, assured of its solidity, the flesh bounds lightly upward, as though wishing to escape from the heavy shadows which outline the breasts, whilst a warm light seems to emanate from the torso, and the tall, adorable figure tenders to all the happy welcome of life. Oh, the divine play of light and shade upon these antique marbles! \* \* \* Only in the Gothic and in Rembrandt do I find such orchestration of shadows. \* \* \*

I possess a little masterpiece which for

a long time baffled all my preconceived ideas of technique, upset all my theories. To it I have vowed my profoundest gratitude because it has made me reflect deeply.

This statue belongs to the period of the Venus de Milo. It gives the same impression of full, powerful modeling, it possesses the same freedom and largeness of detail, in spite of the fact that it is on a much smaller scale. What calm enjoyment it breathes and inspires!

The beautiful shadows which caress it all turn in the same direction \* \* \* producing, with what wisdom, with what science, the effect of a transparent tunic which veils certain parts and accentuates others. \* \* \*

In beautiful sculpture, as in beautiful architecture, the fundamental principle is, that the representation of life, in order to retain the infinite suppleness of nature, should never be arrested, fixed. There-

fore, the shadows, which produce this appearance of flexibility, must be considered with the greatest care. One will note that this has been done in all the ancient masterpieces. That is why they give the impression of softness allied with durability.

When shadows are out of proportion, the effects produced are but blasphemies against nature. They are no longer eloquent and only make the statue look hard and thin. Generally speaking, shadows are most forceful when used in moderation. The Venus de Milo, in particular, owes her strength to this moderation. The effect which she produces is powerful because there is no jarring note to distract the attention. Approaching her step by step one persuades oneself that she has been modeled by the continuous washing of the sea. Is not this what the ancients meant when they said that Aphrodite was created in the bosom of the waters?

## MODERN DRAWINGS AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

BY ELISABETH LUTHER CARY

AN author's personal letters are usually extremely interesting to his public. They not only give glimpses of the personality behind the printed page and enable the reader to gain a kind of double knowledge of the man; the curious intimacy that is hedged about with the hundred and one reserves existing between even the frankest of mortals and his friends, added to the deeper intimacy existing between the writer and his work. The public usually turns the case about and thinks of the letters as showing the real man and the work as showing the mask, but piecing the two together a sense of life and art is gained such as neither alone could give. Frequently, also, they find in the record of personal experience the germ of the book that has interested them, and there is a certain zest in tracing the correspondences and differences.

Between the public work of an artist and the private sketches of his notebooks there is somewhat the same relation with this difference: the sketch is less discreet than the letter and tells us more of the inner truth. In making it the artist is entirely off guard. It is his diary and his experimental essay, meant for no eyes but his own. We read in it failures of courage and accessions of daring; swiftsure revelations of those maddening truths that "careless angels know"; the ascent of sudden heights of inspiration; the flogging of a dull spirit to a pedestrian pace.

Advising students to make sketches in their notebooks of men "as they happen to meet your eye without being perceived by them," Leonardo da Vinci added: "Two things demand the principal attention of a good painter. One is the exact outline and shape of the figure; the other